

## FARMER IN THE FIELD



# HISTORY, LEGEND, CELEBRATION, THE ARTICHOKE

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Much has been written about the artichoke throughout history. Legend has it the goddess Cynara was tossed back to earth by Zeus after he discovered her un-goddess-like behavior and turned her into the plant we know as the artichoke. In 77 A.D. a Roman naturalist called the plant "*one of the earth's monstrosities.*"

In 1922 Andrew Molera, a land owner in the Salinas Valley, encouraged the farming of the "new" vegetable instead of sugar beets so his land tenants could pay him triple what the sugar company did for the same land. It was around this time Ciro Terranova, a member of the mafia, known as the "Artichoke King," began his monopoly of the artichoke market. He terrorized distributors and produce merchants, he even launched an attack on the artichoke fields in California hacking down the plants with machetes in the dead of night. These "artichoke wars" led the Mayor of New York to declare "the sale, display, and possession" of artichokes in New York illegal, although the ban was lifted after he admitted his love for the vegetable.

While California artichokes are available throughout the year, peak season is March through May and again to a smaller degree in October. Virtually 100 percent of all artichokes grown commercially in the United States are grown in California with Castroville proclaiming itself the "Artichoke Center of the World". And so for the past

fifty years it has celebrated the artichoke with the Castroville Artichoke Festival. All you artichoke lovers mark your calendar now, May 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> and don't miss out on all the good food and fun!



### **Artichoke Fun Facts**

The artichoke is a member of the thistle tribe of the sunflower family.

The "vegetable" that we eat is actually the plant's flower bud.

One medium sized artichoke is a good source of vitamin C, folate and potassium. It's low in sodium, fat-free and a dieter's delight at only 25 calories.

One medium to large size artichoke produces approximately 2 ounces of eatable flesh.

### **Learn More**

[www.artichokes.org](http://www.artichokes.org)

[www.artichoke-festival.org](http://www.artichoke-festival.org)

### **My Favorite Way to Cook Artichokes**

When buying your artichokes you want to choose ones that are heavy for their size with tightly closed heads. Trim off the bottom stem, snip the tips of the outer leaves and slice about an inch off the top. *Remember artichokes will darken after cut so either work quickly, rub with lemon or drop into a vinegar and water bath to preserve the color.* Slice cloves of garlic and tuck into the leaves. Use as little or as much as you like. Place artichokes in a steamer basket with about 2" of unsalted water. Drizzle the tops of the chokes with a good Italian dressing or olive oil and balsamic vinegar and steam for about 30 minutes or until you can easily insert a knife into the stem of the choke. Serve hot or cold. No dip is needed but a little mayonnaise never hurt.